For EVERY BOY and GIRL

Jim's Experiment

By Beth Bradford Gilchrist

THE five o'clock trolley from Putney dropped a boy at the Fairport station just three minutes after the train he had planned to take pulled out. This bit of tardiness left an unwelcome hour on the boy's hands. He took a turn through the waiting-room and tried to look quite at his ease while he wondered whether he would have the ill luck to run across anybody who knew him. In one corner a bronzed young fellow of his own age was trying to persuade a collie dog to beg for a cracker. The boy strolled over and looked on.

"That's a fine dog," he remarked. "Yours?"

"No, he belongs to the station, I reckon, or else strayed in. He is rather a beauty, isn't he?" And the brown-faced boy fondled the collie's head. "Going far?" he asked.

"New York."

"That's jolly. So am I. Been down for the summer in Maine, just going home. Same with you, maybe?"

The first boy shook his head. Then a great desire to explain matters overtook him. "No," he said, "I live over in the next town. New York's only the end of the land journey; I take the steamer there. I'm going to Panama." He tried to bring out the last sentence casually.

The brown-faced boy stopped playing with the collie. "Panama? I say, that is jolly! How are you going? I mean, is it just for fun or for work or—why?"

"My cousin's got a position down there, he's an engineer, you know. And he's invited me to go along."

"My, but that's great! I say, you're quite an adventurer, aren't you? I'd like to hear about it—if you care to talk, you know. My name's Gordon, Philip Gordon."

"I'm Jim Bradstreet. There's nothing much to tell. I meet Jack—that's my cousin—in New York and we sail to-morrow. It's hot in here. Come out on the platform, won't you?"

Gordon shook his head. "Got to keep an eye on the duds over there. Checked all yours? Or do you travel light?"

Jim Bradstreet flushed. "I'm not taking much. I'll get what I need in New York. Father doesn't approve of my going," he blurted out. "He wrote 'no' to Jack's letter inviting me to visit him down there and he doesn't know anything about this."

Gordon looked at the other boy seriously. "I see," he said, "you—you're running away."

Jim nodded.

Gordon smoothed the collie's head with slow fingers. "How'd it come about?" he asked.

"Oh, we argued it back and forth. Father threw in my face all the schemes I'd ever had and declared that in three months this would have gone the way of all the rest. Couldn't see this was different. He wouldn't hear of my leaving school—even for Panama. Said when I was eighteen I might decide for myself on China or Patagonia and he wouldn't oppose me, though he wants me to go to college. Said Panama would keep. I got wrathy. I've education enough, more than many chaps get; and besides I want to see the canal in the making. Father thinks I don't know what I want, but I'm old enough to decide for myself. It's my own life anyhow—he hasn't got to live it."

"He's got to see you live it," said Gordon soberly. "But how about your cousin? Will he take you along—now?"

"Oh, I'll have to explain things to Jack, but he's got sense, he'll understand my reasons, and he'll be able to stow me away somewhere, I guess."

"What's to hinder your father telegraphing your cousin right off to-night when he misses you?"

"He won't miss me. He won't know anything about it until he gets my letter after the steamer sails. Father and I don't see much of each other, we're alone except for the servants and I'm often off all night at some fellow's. He's too deep in his books—he cares more for them than he does for me." Jim spoke quite simply, without bitterness, but with conviction.

Gordon studied him attentively for a minute. "Is your father James R. Bradstreet, the writer?" he asked.

Jim nodded.

"Oh, I say," remonstrated the other boy. "My father likes his things," he added. "He says they're great."

There was a little silence. Philip Gordon was trying to imagine himself and his father in a like situation. "He will miss you," he said.

"He'll have his book, the new one. Oh, no, he won't really mind."

"I don't believe it," flatly declared the other boy. "Fathers always do. Why, mine— Do you know your father very well?" he asked abruptly.

Jim Bradstreet stopped fumbling with the bills and change in his pocket—his allowance had opportunely fallen due the day before, an ample monthly income—and stared at the questioner.

"Know him? Why, of course. We've lived—" Then he shut his mouth. When he stopped to think about it there was not a boy in Putney with whom he did not feel better acquainted.

"Because," went on Gordon, "if you don't know him well, it seems to me you've been a bit hasty, not quite fair. Maybe he has his reasons and good ones. You ought to give him the benefit of the doubt just as you would to a fellow you didn't know very well."

Gordon waved his cap to a man who came hastily into the waiting-room. "My father," he explained. "Do you know, I used to feel about him just the way you do now about your father. That was before we got acquainted. Oh, but my father's great! He's the best friend I've got and the jolliest. See here, Bradstreet, I reckon your father's worth getting acquainted with, more so than most. I heard father say once when he'd finished reading one of his books, 'There's a man worth knowing.' Hullo, here's the train." Gordon began to collect suit cases, golf bags and the miscellaneous paraphernalia of summer sports. The tall man strode toward them.

Jim Bradstreet held out his hand suddenly to the brown-faced boy. "Good-by," he said. He swung out of the station, his head up, the light of determination in his eyes, and caught a passing car for Putney.

Twilight had fallen when he reached home. In the dusky garden he could see his father busy over his favorite rose-bushes. He looked big and strong and gentle, not at all a ferocious man, nor one likely to drive his only son to the desperate strait of running away.

But as for getting better acquainted with him Jim discovered it no easy task. One great difficulty lay in Mr. Bradstreet's utter ignorance of the purpose underlying his son's loitering in the hall, his frequent excuses for a trip to the garden when his father was busy there, his unwonted lingering over meals and his unusual talkativeness. When Jim entered the library with an awkward, "I think I'll study here if you don't mind," his father would nod a pleasant acquiescence and turn to his work again, leaving Jim to his books with a consideration for his son's study hours that would have quickly unsealed the boy's lips had he understood it. He did not know how his father watched him while he struggled over a tough problem in algebra or wrestled with a knotty passage of Cicero.

It had never taken Jim long to get acquainted with any of the boys he knew. He grew impatient of delay; had he given up Panama for this?

Two weeks had dragged their unsuccessful way through Putney, and Jim's ardor had dulled to a somewhat discouraged persistence when, turning a corner in company with a half-dozen boys one Saturday afternoon, he caught sight of his father swinging down the other side of the street, heading for the woods and fields on his usual Saturday afternoon tramp. An idea struck Jim.

"I say, fellows," he cried, "you'll have to excuse me this afternoon. Sorry——Good-by."

He sprinted after the tall striding figure.

As the rapid steps that overtook him brought his son's face alongside, Mr. Bradstreet stopped abruptly. "Why, Jim! What's the matter? Anything wanted—?"

"Oh, don't stop, father. Keep on, please. I just wanted to ask—do you mind if I come along?"

All that afternoon father and son tramped the country roads. Through the fields they pushed, explored thicket-tangled woods, investigated a swamp, examined the forsaken nests of a flicker and a humming-bird, and exchanged opinions on every subject that occurred to them from sermons to snaring rabbits. When they came up the maple-guarded path together five hours later, hot, dusty, tired, Jim's eyes were shining happily.

"It's been bully," he cried. "You're better company than any boy I know, father. I wish I'd discovered it sooner. May I go next time?"

"Every time, Jim," answered his father, heartily. "They have been pretty lonely, these rambles of mine. Come every time you like."

The words were simple but the man's hand rested for a minute on the boy's shoulder. Jim liked to feel it there. He spoke out in unstudied fashion the thought that was in his mind.

"Do you know, dad," he said, "I rather fancy we'd make a pretty good pair of pals."

Up-stairs, Jim, as he scrubbed his hands, was saying to himself, "Some day I'll tell him how near I came to being in Panama this afternoon."

That Saturday proved to be only the first of many, and on week-days Jim and his father were no longer strangers to each other. As the winter wore on, snow-shoeing, skating, skeeing kept them together for hours, traversing the white fields, skimming over the shining lake, flying in long leaps down the rolling snow-covered hills. Their confidence in each other's sympathy grew as the weeks passed. Jim brought to his father his boyish puzzles and often shared with him his day-dreams. And the man's mature sense imparted to the boy balance and steadiness and breadth. Sometimes as they sat in the library, each at work, Mr. Bradstreet would glance up and catching Jim's eye read aloud some sentence, his own or another's, that had struck his fancy, certain of the boy's interest if not of his full appreciation, and not infrequently glad of his fresh, youthful point of view.

"THAT'S A FINE DOG," HE REMARKED, IS IT "YOURS?"

So it came about quite naturally that one day his father spoke to Jim of the book he was writing. Mr. Bradstreet was reticent in such matters. He seldom mentioned his own literary affairs, and when he began to speak to his son about them Jim recognized it as final proof of a degree of intimacy his most daring fancies had failed to picture. In the pride he felt at becoming his father's literary confidant, he at first gave no thought to the book as a possible rival. But gradually, as with the wearing on of winter the book grew and added pages to pages and his father's absorption in it grew also, an old idea returned to Jim's brain, the feeling that he had expressed to Philip Gordon, a sense that what his father cared for the most in all the world was his work.

On day he overhead his father speaking to a friend of many years' standing. "It is the best yet, Melrose," Mr. Bradstreet said, touching with a gentle lingering gesture the pile of closely typed sheets on the desk. "I'd like to be remembered by it. I would willingly risk my reputation on this one book. Why, do you know," he laughed a slow laugh of humorous self-appreciation, "I am grown positively maudlin about this story. I am as timid over it as a hen over her one chick, and that a duckling! If anything should happen to it—but nothing can. You see it is my dearest possession."

The very next day Jim was sent by his father to return a book to an elderly invalid friend. In the course of conversation the old gentleman spoke to Jim of his father's new book and of the enthusiastic hopes the author had for its success.

"I've got to beat that book," Jim whispered to himself on his way home.

Spring deepened through a mist of young green into the fuller tones of summer and Jim and his father prepared to spend the long vacation together. Hitherto they had been much apart in the summer. July of this year saw them established together in a cottage that clung to the skirts of the bigger hotel perched above a translucent Vermont lake. Mr. Bradstreet found it easy to work there. He had been too deeply in the swing of it to leave the book behind, and for several hours each day he wrote steadily. Meanwhile Jim amused himself with the youth of the hotel and cottages. He was quite used to being pointed out to transient visitors as the "son of James R Bradstreet, you know, who is summering here," but the young people hailed him with no allusions to his father. Among his contemporaries Jim needed no references.

He was beginning to confess himself baffled and sometimes he felt he almost hated the story he had gloried in a few months before. He was not used to playing a secondary role.

Toward the end of August Mr. Bradstreet was called away suddenly and Jim was left for a day or two to keep bachelor's hall in their three-room apartment.

"Oh, yes, he will be back very soon," the boy explained to an interested group of ladies on the hotel piazza. "In fact, I expect him this very evening, Mrs. Gray. No, it was not sickness at all, Mrs. Bacon. Lonely, Mrs. Green? Oh, I'm coming on first rate, and there's a fishing trip that will keep me busy this morning. I see the fellows are waiting—if you will excuse me—" and Jim bowed himself off.

Mid-afternoon instead of noon saw the return of the anglers. From the point where they had struck into the woods they rowed swiftly, hungrily back toward the hotel landing.

"Hello," cried Ned Fellowes suddenly, "I wonder what's doing over there by the hotel?"

There were signs of unwonted activity about the hotel, men, women and children, guests and employees, could be seen running across the lawn. Several of the women carried pitchers and pails, the men were unwinding a coil of hose. From over the trees that shut out a view of the cottages puffed a delicate spiral of smoke.

The first boat turned a bend in the lake.

"Jiminy!" gasped the boy in the bow, twisting his head around. "It's a fire! Row, fellows, row! Don't let's miss it!"

"I say, it's yours, Jim," shrilled an excited voice. "It's your cottage!"

"Yes," said Jim quietly. "Keep her head steady, Bill." With long strokes he sent the boat ahead of the others, darting in a swift streak toward the hotel pier. Jim had seen at a glance the location of the fire, and there was room for, but one thought in his brain.

At the landing he sprang out and raced across the grass and down the little stretch of shaded road. Smoke was pouring from every window of the cottage where were his and his father's rooms. The crackle of flames came to him as he ran; he could see forked red tongues licking at the roof. Now a broadside of fire burst through the windows on the south—his own rooms opened to the north. Two or three men played a futile stream of water on the roof, others strove to bring into action two more lines of hose.

Employees of the hotel urged the guests back out of danger; they made a cordon around the cottage.

"Keep back, please."

"Nobody else allowed inside."

"Can't let you throug', Mr. Jim—it's a furnace in there—Here, stop that boy!"

The one idea had kept its place pre-eminent in Jim's brain as he ran. His father was gone, and his father's manuscript lay in his care. His father's words, "If anything should happen to it—it is my dearest possession," seared themselves on his consciousness. There was no envy now. It did not occur to him now to wish "to beat the book." He swerved a little from his straight course, passed the head waiter who had forbidden him passage, and darted into the burning cottage.

When Jim awoke to consciousness some hours later he felt rather than saw, for his eyes were bandaged, that there were people by the bed.

"Dad," he whispered tentatively.

"Yes, Jim," answered his father's voice close to his ear. "Here I am, my boy!"

Jim felt very tired and very uncomfortable, but anxiety welled up within him. "Dad, is the—did you find the book—all right?"

"The book is safe, Jim," said his father. And then suddenly his voice hurried on with a little catch in it, "Jim, boy, what did you think I cared for that wretched book compared with you?"

A warm feeling stirred at Jim's heart. He tried to move the hand that lay on the coverlet. It was big and heavy with bandages and hard to lift. His father understood the movement and laid his own on the poulticed fingers. Jim smiled, content, but still a little bewildered.

"It isn't a wretched book," he contradicted, weakly. "It's a bully one, the best yet, and—you said you'd like to be remembered by it."

"You are the book I'd rather be remembered by, Jim," said his father gently.

THREE "IF'S"

By Louise M. Berry.

"If I were as young as I used to be,"
Said dear old Grandmother pensively,
While a troubled frown crossed her placid brow,
"I wouldn't tire as I do now.
I recall the time when with all my might
I could work from dawn to candle light,
And it wouldn't seem hard at all to me
If I were as young as I used to be."

Then Mother laughed in a roguish way
And said to Grandmother with manner gay:
"If I were as young as I used to be
I'd have nothing to worry about," said she;
"No babies to care for, no house to run,
No object in life but a search for fun.
Yet for all life's pleasures I wouldn't exchange
My duties to-day, though it may seem strange.
Still, from many a care I would be free
If I were as young as I used to be."

Then there came an echo from little Jim,
Who seemed to think it was "up to" him.

And he solemnly said, "Oh, jiminy!
If I were as young as I used to be
I wouldn't have any sums to do,
Just lie in the cradle and say 'A-goo.'
I'd be dandled and played with from morn till night,
And folks would all say I was very bright;
And everyone would be petting me
If I were as young as I used to be."

The Chinese Laundry Man.

Here's the Chinese Laundry man,
Who does up the shirts on the cold water plan;
And if you read backwards you plainly will see,
That the name of the Chinaman was Johnnie Hop Lee.

MANNERS

By Annie W. McCullough.

Now, Fido, stand and make your bow
To my new doll, as you know how.
She's come to live with you and me;
Her name is Gladys Rosalie.

Her nice new dress you must not tear,
Nor tousle up her pretty hair.
You are the biggest, so be good,
And treat her as the biggest should.

If you will act just as I say
We three can have good times at play;
But if you don't, I promise you,
There'll be good times for only two!

A GOOD REASON.

By Caroline M. Fuller.

"Why do you wear your tail so short?"
The kittens asked the rabbit.
"I think the reason," he replied,
"Is simply force of habit."